

# String of Fate

by Queen Bee Sera

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Summary: Two people connected by the String of Fate are destined lovers, regardless of place, time, or circumstances. This magical cord may stretch or tangle, but never breaks. Sera and Tabris stumble upon each other as orphans in the Alienage; they've been attached at the hip -or pinkies- ever since. Only time will tell what life has in store for them. Warning: canon background divergence.

## 1. Ties that Bind

Date:  
04-11-2016

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\*\*String of Fate\*\*

By: Queen Bee Sera and  
LanceTrance

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\*\*A/N:\*\* First and foremost, this story does change quite a few things in terms of background canon regarding Tabris and features a city elf that grows up with Sera. The Inquisition itself won't be for quite some time, as we start when these two meet as young orphans :) This means that Tabris is an ordinary elf and is not a Warden (nor will be for she is too young), just to clear up any confusion.

This story is written alongside another author LanceTrance (I most definitely recommend reading his stories), he is my main inspiration of getting into writing myself and is the co-author to this story as

he works to overcome writer's block. Thank you for helping me bring this idea to life Lance, you're a lot of fun to work with and an amazing writer :) Hope everybody enjoys this new story, cheers!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Ties that Bind<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>Wails are nothing new in the alienage, it's just one of those sounds that take some time getting used to before it bleeds out in the everyday city noise. But this one is different, and it's timing is peculiar. Stars blot out the sky and most of Denerim's streets are empty at night -save for the drunkards or criminals- and the alienage is even more so quiet since the elven community is under curfew, a 'preventative' measure to keep <em>knife-ear<em> troublemakers out of the city and crack down on the thefts on the rise. The cries tug at Sera's heart strings even though she knows better, life is harsh and survival comes first... But something compels her to investigate.

Grabbing her slingshot, she tucks it in the waistband of her ripped breeches and rolls out from a makeshift tent she's made herself, she's proud to call the tattered blanket above her head home. Not many have even that luxury, and often times she's had to go on the hunt to steal another blanket when hers disappeared. She didn't really think of it as stealing though, it just happened to lay around for the taking and she'd easily seize the opportunity, for she knows not of morality or justice.

"Who's there?" Nothing but shrieks answer her, and she reluctantly sets out to follow the origin of the crying. She reaches back to re-tie her lopsided ponytail, and winces when her arms ache just from that. There's a gaping hole in her stomach responsible for the weakness, she hasn't had anything decent to eat for a while and is saving her loaf for an emergency. Her hand instinctively flies to her mouth to muffle a yelp when sharp pain diffuses along the bottom of her foot, she wobbles over to the wall and grits the back of her teeth as she lifts to inspect her heel.

Blood isn't an uncommon sight, and she braces herself as she plucks the small sharp rock embedded in her foot then adjusts her meager foot wrappings to cover the cut. Her head snaps up when the sobs rapidly grow in pitch and volume, something's most definitely wrong and she hurries to see what the commotion is all about this time. Hesitance fills her when she hears a low gruff voice seemingly chastise whoever is crying, but her curiosity gets the better of her and she hugs the wall of a broken down shack as she nears the corner.

"It's all your fault!" An unknown man shouts, and Sera musters up all the courage she can to dip her head and peek around the corner. Her eyes widen when she sees two city guards surrounding a little girl on her knees, the child looks younger than her and is the source of all the ruckus. "If you didn't lose it on that woman none of this shit would've happened!" What's going on?

"That whore had it coming after she smacked me," the second guard spits on the crying child and his hands are on hips as he snarls, "oi

shut yer trap y'stupid knife-ear, before you bite the dirt like your shitty ma!" \_They... Killed her mum? Why?!\_ He kicks the little girl in the stomach and knocks her on her back, and Sera grits her teeth as her hand smooths over the slingshot. She's already in danger for being out on the streets when curfew is in effect, and even throwing a rock at a human -and **\*\*guard\*\***- will more than likely have severe repercussions.

Powerless, helpless, cruel lessons she's quickly learned during her time in the alienage ever since she herself was dumped here to fend for herself. All because her ears are just a touch bit pointier than a human's, something she can't control nor change. She does nothing but watch as the guards bicker amongst themselves, something about a \_bitch\_ not giving what the guard asked for and so he \_simply\_ killed her. Just like that, a woman was condemned to death and now an orphaned child is getting their \_punishment\_ despite not doing anything.

All because of \_fucking\_ ears.

"Mamae!" The little girl continues to scream at the top of her lungs, and the \_good\_ guard is trying to hold back the corrupted man from letting loose and taking his next victim. Sera's jaw clenches unbearably tight, she can't take this anymore but she can't force herself to move. Her legs shake with ingrained fear of the human overlords, anger boils in her chest and threatens to choke her until all she sees is red. She notices how some doors are open just a crack, eyes peer through to watch the commotion but nobody has the courage to defy the \_righteous law\_ thrust upon them.

Nobody wants to be responsible for starting the next alienage purge.

\_Shut up, you're making it worse for yourself...\_ That's what Sera wants to tell the \_crybaby\_ on the ground, but every part of her screams to help. \_I can't. Can't take care of her if I can't find food for me.\_ A child can't afford to be responsible for an even needier child, and there's no way Sera can feed the mouth on that \_thing\_ that won't stop crying. \_I wanna...\_ She manages to force her aching foot to slide back a touch, she looks away and twists her torso for she cannot bear to watch anymore. \_Can't help.\_

And then she notices how the Hahren's door is opened just the smallest crack too, and all Sera sees is red.

Suffocating rage wells up in her and she spits at the ground, the elves being a \_proud\_ and \_close-knit\_ community is nothing but utter \_shite\_ shoved down everybody's throats. It's every elf for themselves here, and everybody else is content to live in this \_shithole\_ as they regale tales of how great elves \_used\_ to be.

\_Look how great it is now, huh? Watchin' kids get beat up, so fuckin' great.\_ It's more than enough to make her change her mind and her feet have already carried her off around the corner, she freezes when the guards spot her but stands her ground even when the corrupted man shouts, "the hell you doin' out this late at night brat? Get your ass back inside before I give you a fucking spanking too!"

"Calm down," the other guard implores, "they're just kids Garrett,

just let them go and let's go back to our posts alright?"

"Don't tell me to calm the fuck down!" Sera takes advantage of the commotion as she forces herself to move for the little girl, she watches the men warily and never takes her eyes off them. One hand is on the slingshot just in case, her razor sharp slits narrow in defiance when the corrupted guard glares at her. She bends down and grabs the little girl's wrist, it's so fucking small in her hand. She roughly yanks the crying child up into standing, she wants to tell the girl to shut up before you make it worse for \*\*both\*\* of us... But her tongue has lost it's ability to move, and a thick lump sits inside her throat.

Pulling along, her gaze never wavers; she can't afford to waver or it may very well be the end for her too. Even after she rounds the corner her guard remains up and high, she notices how quickly the doors slam shut when she glances to see if any other elves will help. Fat chance. She knows she's alone in this, she's always been alone and she prefers it that way. Who needs those stupid jerks anyways? She's done just fine surviving by herself this long, however long it has actually been.

Proolly as small as her, she glances at the young girl she's tugging along and frowns when the tears keep flowing. "Quit crying, it's not doing nothing. We're on our o-"

"I want mamae!" Fuck. This is going to get annoying fast. Sera has half a mind to ditch this little creature and go back to her home to sleep, there's no way she'll get any rest tonight if this thing will cry all night. Tomorrow was another day to fight for the right just to breathe, she can't pickpocket or scavenge for scraps if she's sleep deprived and with an empty stomach. "Mamae! Where are you?!"

"Your mum's gone," Sera bites out harshly and whirls around as she looks down at the blurry steel-blue orbs, she dishes out the cruel truth as if it's nothing-for it isn't to her since she's lived through far worse. But she falters when the tears keep streaming like a river, she kneels to get to the girl's eye level and asks gently, "what's your name?"

"K-Kall-" the little creature hiccups in between and sucks in snot, Sera cringes at the sound and shudders. Eugh, gross...  
"Kallian."

"Well Kalli, I'm Sera. I'll take care of you, good yeah? I'll show you yer new home c'mon," she holds out her hand and braces herself when the little girl wipes her nose across her forearm, and a soft palm slips into the calloused one. She silently guides Kallian back to her make-shift home, her eyebrows furrow at the constant sniffing and she grits her teeth as she tries not to lash out in frustration. She's been forced to mature beyond her years but she has yet to understand what loss feels like, all she knows is that she never wants to hear or see the young girl like this ever again.

"It's just you an' me against the world now, Kalli. We'll survive."  
It's like havin' a little sister, right?

"What's ser-vife mean Saraw?"

\_...Oh \_\*\*\_fuck\_\*\*\_.\_

\* \* \*

><p>Sniffles haunt her, she rolls the other way until her back faces the child who's cried herself to sleep in <em>her<em> bed. Well to be fair, it was nothing but hard ground covered by a ratty old linen sheet and the \_brat\_ had the gall to complain of Sera's living space. \_Take what you can get \_is what she shot back to Kallian, and the young girl didn't take what she had gotten very well whatsoever. \_She expectin' me to own a palace or what?\_

"Mamae..." \_Great\_, here we go.\_ Sera draws her knees up to her chest and folds her arm under her head as her pillow, her eyebrows furrow in anger when she hears the little girl suck in snot and softly cry over her dead mother. \_I didn't have no parents, just dumped here and grew up by myself. \_\_Don't remember nobody but me.\_

How many years has it even been, really? The more she wonders how old Kallian might be, the more she wonders over herself too. She needs to know just what the young child is capable of doing and chances are Kallian could probably swipe a few loaves in broad daylight without getting in trouble, for people would just amount it to a little girl not knowing any better.

\_Everybody knows me though, selfish jerks won't help and just stand 'round praying at that stupid tree. Why can't it have apples at least? \_She rolls back around to inspect the tear-stricken face, she just can't sleep no matter how tired she is right now. \_Even if I teach 'er to steal, won't be long before they run her out and throw rocks too. Some 'elven' glory...\_ She reaches forward and tucks the sandy blonde locks behind Kallian's ear; despite the worry of feeding the mouth in front of her, it's nice to have a companion.

\_Sort of, anyways.\_ She doesn't get the chance to talk with someone often, she knows she won't have compelling conversations with this little \_creature\_ in front of her but it's not like she cares for that sort of thing anyways. \_Better than nobody.\_ Her focus everyday is to scavenge and find something relatively edible to put in her belly, and though that work is about to double at least she'll have someone that goes through the same hardship as her.

\_She better not keep \_\_crying\_\_, or she's on her own. She'll learn like how I \_\_had to \_\_if she gets annoying.\_ \_\_Fuck, this is a bad idea innit?\_ Still, there's some sort of sense in which she feels like she \_has\_ to protect Kallian, something that guides her to try and make sure the things she had to go through would never be repeated with this young girl in front of her. But with how life is like in the slums, it's completely unavoidable not to turn to crime and every single inhabitant scrapes by somehow.

\_Won\_\_der wh\_\_a\_\_t her mum did? \_\_I'll ask Kalli 'morrow, maybe we can live wherever she does.\_ She's not quite sure if she herself wants to go back though, she's seen her share of death and yet each body is like a dagger that carves to engrave the haunting memory in her heart. \_It'll be worse for 'er I guess, if she sees her mum like that. If she hasn't already.\_ Her eyebrows scrunch when she sees the child shiver, and so she instinctively tucks closer as she wraps an arm around Kallian's shoulders to pull in what she hopes will

eventually be a warm embrace soon. She's cold too, but she can't pull the blanket off the ground for the dirt is far colder and there's bugs waiting to bite.

Dull pain continuously throbs at her heel, she reminds herself to double check the gash in the morning and pray it doesn't get infected. The last time she had to cut open a wound --sounds dumb-- in order to drain the pus, she couldn't walk until the fear of starving to death forced her to grit her teeth and push past the pain. She'll do whatever she can in order to avoid the same mistake again, and at least she has a partner in crime now. She smiles at that thought and her cheeks ache a little, the muscles aren't used to the action and the only other time she smiles is when she nabs someone with her slingshot, then hides before she's caught.

Soft snores grab her attention and she looks down with mild interest, though all she can see in the dim light is the sandy blonde hair now tickling her mouth. She feels tiny hands grab her tattered shirt, and the little body scoots closer towards her. Sera's heart swells and her smile easily turns into a grin, she weaves her hand in the younger girl's hair and pulls closer. Warmth soothes aching bones and sore muscles, this definitely beats the cold of sleeping alone.

\_I guess this ain't so bad after all.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"I'm hungry."<p>

\_I take that back. It's \*\*worse\*\*.\_

"You already said that like five fuckin' times," Sera grumbles as she inspects the cut on her heel, she tosses an annoyed glare at the younger elf who's gotten \_too\_ comfortable in her living space \_too\_ fast.

"You said a bad word. You shouldn't."

"Well I got news for you pipsqueak, I do lotsa things I \_shouldn't\_ and I don't give a shit."

"That's another bad word." \_Fuck! What's wrong with this brat?!\_ "I'm hungry."

"Will you shut up Kalli? I'll find us somethin' to eat \*\*after\*\* I figure out what to do with this," she gestures to her heel, and she can see from the child's deadpan stare that Kallian either doesn't understand the pain she's in, or doesn't give a shit.

"But I'm hungry\*\* now\*\*."

\_She's really going for 'doesn't give a shit', looks like.\_

"Can you wait just two frigging minutes?" Relief wells up in her when the little girl \_finally\_ seals her flapping gums, and Sera's concentration goes back to her heel as she tries to think of what to do to keep it safe from infection. The wrappings are dirty, and a quick check at the blankets show they're in no better shape to be ripped apart and used. Her eyebrows furrow and frustration easily swallows her thoughts, her anger nearly \_skyrockets\_ to the edge of

her breaking point when Kallian breaks the silence.

"Two minutes." \_I'm gonna kill this brat, I swear. Does she even know how to count or what?\_ "When I get cuts, mamae puts elfroot on them."

"Well I don't have no fuckin' elfroot." \_Else I wouldn't have this frigging problem. Frig little kids are dumb, I wasn't this bad.\_

"That's a bad w-" the child's mouth promptly closes when Sera puts her palm over the nagging lips, she has half a mind to rip them right off. Unfortunately it doesn't work as well as she wishes it does, and Kallian continues to muffle beneath her palm, "there's lots of elfroot in the larder."

"What? What larder?" Sera stares for a moment and then realization dawns on her when she sees how the steel-blue eyes water, and she frowns. "We can't go back to your house. You'll cry like a baby again." \_She's gonna anyways.\_

"But I'm hungry." \_What's that got to-\_ "there's lots of food, and elfroot. And mamae."

"Exactly why we can't go back," her face falls when tears slide down the little girl's cheeks, she just **\*\*knows\*\*** it's a bad idea. She feels it in her gut, and it's screaming within her mind... But if everything they need is in that house, then there's no choice. \_I can go inside without 'er, who knows what her mum looks like if a guard beat her up?\_ "Alright..." She braces a palm against the shoddy wall and slowly clambers to her feet, she tries not to put too much weight through her injured foot and holds out her hand for the child. "Let's go, then." \_Gotta move fast before others get to it.\_ "But there better be some elfroot."

"Promise!" Things are starting to look up, and Sera is starting to feel that not only is it nice to have a friend, but that life might not be so harsh and cruel anymore.

Everything is about to fall into her lap and all it took was a little bravery and suck up the pain, as she usually does. The child looks up at her with concerned eyes as she stumbles along with her aching foot, she uses the wall of the slum shacks as support as they work their way along. She courageously glares at the other elves they pass by, every single one of them has constantly criticized Sera and never helped her. She learned very fast that in this world, she can only trust herself.

\_They just winge 'bout being a 'proper' elf, and they call **\*\*me\*\*** stupid? They're the stupid dummies.\_ She didn't dare venture beyond the alienage often either, for she would be ridiculed by the humans just because of her ears and treated horribly. She'd more often than not be spat on and sometimes even kicked, but the number one reaction was that everybody would eye her suspiciously as they hid their coin purses... From a bloody damned child. Though, Sera didn't think of herself that way, and thought \_she\_ was the mature one around even if she played pranks and dumped things on people while she hid on the rooftops. She needed an outlet and had to have fun somehow, after all. \_And they deserve it.\_

Tiny fingers that \_shouldn't\_ be in her palm squeeze tightly, she looks down at the younger elf and frowns at the big fat tears sliding down the cheeks it \_shouldn't\_ be sliding down. The two slow to a stop and she follows Kallian's gaze to the small shack that Sera was in front of last night, and the door looks like it took a beating itself with how desperately it tries to hang on the hinges. \_This is a bad idea.\_ She's driven by necessity, and there's no choice. She knows for a fact it won't be the last time she's seen a dead body, and it won't be the first for the girl accompanying her...

\_But it's her **\*\*mum\*\***.\_

"C-come on," the small voice urges, "elfroot, and food. Don't leave me, please." \_Fuck.\_ The way the words quiver and how much closer the child moves to cling to her makes her stomach churn with nausea, and her heart plummets with dread. Repressed rage boils in her blood, she **\*\*hates\*\*** this alienage with a burning passion. \_Maybe I oughta run 'way, go to them elves outside the city? I bet they're better than here.\_

"I'll hold yer hand the whole time, 'kay Kalli? I won't leave you, ever."

Stepping inside, the first thing to hit Sera is the disgusting smell of the place and that says a lot, considering they're in the worst slums where there's no hope for sanitation in this part of the city. She hears buzzing and knows that's not a good sign, she grips the little girl's hand and uses her nose to guide her in what she hopes will stay \_away\_ from the body. "I wanna see mam-

"No you don't, trust me Kalli. It's just you and me now okay?" She grits the back of her teeth, anger buzzes underneath her skin like little june beetles when she hears the sniffles. "Where's the kitchen?" She reluctantly lets the child lead but maintains a firm hold, the narrow hallway leaves little for movement. \_She's lucky she got to live here, roof over her head.\_ The thick scent floods her senses, sticks to every \_fucking\_ nostril hair, envelopes her mind and unwillingly burns another scar in her weary heart, burdening tiny shoulders that were never meant to be burdened with something like this.

\_None of this is right.\_ Her eyes widen when they step to the left, into the presumed kitchen. Her heart sinks even more, she should have known this would happen especially if everybody watched through slit cracks of their doors. She scoffs at the notion of \_community\_ as she spits bitterly, "ransacked, every cabinet empty..." Sometimes she wonders if they really are elves, or if they're just the dirty animals the humans claim them to be.

Or maybe there's no difference.

"No, there's things on the other side. There has to be," \_there won't be.\_ Sera allows the child to lead her around the center island, and says nothing when Kallian looks inside all the opened cabinets. "But there's..." \_Nothing.\_ "Mamae hid stuff so I wouldn't take it-" \_instead they found it and took it all.\_ The little girl lets go of her hand and searches frantically, even go so far as crawling inside a cabinet. "There has to be elfroot somewhere," \_she's not looking for food?\_ "It's here, it has to be. Where did it go? Why is everything gone?" The voice cracks as it echoes inside the cabinet,



and Sera clenches her fists when the movement stops and she hears the thick plops hit the rotten wood inside. \_Crying **\*\*again\*\***, fuck.\_  
"Mamae... Help me..."

\_Nobody is going to help us but ourselves.\_ Sera forces her feet to move as she walks over to sit beside the cabinet that hides the tiny elf, she blindly puts her hand inside and rests it on top of what feels like a knee or shoulder. There's scrambling and she looks over, only for the air to be emptied from her lungs when Kallian embraces her in a crushing hug as she wails mournfully. The older elf simply glares at all the empty cabinets surrounding them, her anger easily burns away the throbbing ache of her foot. Her head snaps up when she hears creaks out in the hallway, and her hand flies to her slingshot as she protectively wraps an arm around the shoulders of the crying child.

\_I'll hit 'em right between the frigging eyes if they try somethin' on us.\_ She's frozen stiff when somebody pokes their head around the corner, and all her bravery is merely a bluster as she clenches her jaw and stares menacingly, her own eyes shine bright with repressed tears of frustration. But she refuses to back down, and the intruding elf glances around the kitchen only to see there's nothing left to scavenge...

Then leaves, just like that. She would have done the same, she has done the same. And though she can't really blame the scavenger, her rising rage swallows her whole and she wishes she had the courage to use her slingshot and hurt them. It's every person for themselves out here, and Sera wouldn't honestly be surprised if the little girl's mother had clothes stripped off as well, before the Hahren would swoop in and try to make everything seem better with a flowery speech and dignifying burial.

Dignity is but a word, in this forsaken alienage. And like all words, Sera's learned they're utterly useless and don't help her in her fight for the right to live. She looks down at the child in her arms and moves to hug tighter as she buries her face in the crook of Kallian's neck, she squeezes her eyes tighter in a sorry attempt to stifle her own tears. There's nothing that can be said, nothing that can be made better, and she's upset with herself that she still came here despite knowing it was a bad idea. The harsh reminder of what reality is like is too much, and she desperately clings to the little body sobbing against her.

Even if they're hungry, even if they're hurting, at least they're not alone.

"It's just me and you now, Kalli. And I'll **\*\*never\*\*** leave you, I'll **\*\*always\*\*** be around."

"Promise?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." Kallian's head snaps up to her and the steel-blue eyes widen with fear, Sera sighs and manages a small grin as she ruffles the sandy blonde hair. "It means I promise, Kalli. I don't actually wanna die or have a fucking needle in my eye."

Silence for a time, and the little girl gradually calms down as she hugs Sera even tighter. \_She's kinda strong, tiny but mighty like

me.\_ Energy drains from their frail bodies minute by minute, the hunger saps all strength and leaves a gaping hole in their growling stomachs. \_Gotta find some grub soon, might needa eat that last loaf.\_ But apparently, that's not the most pressing issue for one of them at the moment.

"...You said a bad word again."

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## 2. Promises Under the Blue Sky

Date:  
04-22-2016

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\*\*String of Fate\*\*

By: Queen Bee Sera and  
LanceTrance

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\*\*A/N: \*\*A little more lighthearted than the first chapter, though this story will have it's fair share of angst moments (hence the hurt/comfort tag) since life in the slums/alienage would hardly be peachy. Lance and I can't wait until we get to the parts where these two are a little more grown up, where their personalities and friendship will really start to shine :) We apologize in advance if we make the coming blight seem like it ended in a week :P For those that don't know it yet, you can customize your reading experience in the center, just below the story summary. We recommend the georgia font and the black background white font contrast, but of course it's up to you and what appeals to your eyes the most. Reading is for your enjoyment after all :) Cheers!

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Promises Under the Blue Sky<strong>

\* \* \*

><p>"That one, right there." Sera points down from the scaffolding the two sit on, the younger elf sits in between her legs and she's protectively wrapped an arm around Kallian's midriff, "see 'im?" She smirks when she gets a mouthful of hair as the child nods fervently, "take my slingshot and shoot like we practiced. Aim it at him, he deserves it."<p>

"But hurting people is bad." A roll of the eyes, \_there's no way she'd last a week on the streets without me if she thinks like that.\_

"What 'bout if he's hurt people? Don't ya think he deserves it?"

There's silence for a time, and she grins when Kallian muses on the decision as she hums and hrms out loud. And then her grin falls as she frowns when the younger girl pipes with excitement, and the little head shoots up as steel-blue eyes stare at Sera with resolve.

"I think we should help people instead of hurting them!"

"You can't even help yourself, how do you think you'll help someone else?"

"I'm helping you," Kallian mumbles and her posture slumps as she pouts, the older elf rolls her eyes again as she bites back with a sarcastic tone.

"Yeah, yer helping so~ much. Eating my food and making me work harder is lotsa help." Her eyebrows furrow and anger thrums in her nerves, her stomach's growling and she sacrificed her last loaf of bread in order to both feed and cheer up the big mouth in front of her. She's in a terrible mood and getting even crankier the longer the child stays silent, she should listen to me if I'm taking care of her. And older.\_ Her temple twitches when she feels the small hand resting on her lap disappear, and soon after a tiny sniffle. Her lips purse in a thin line, the frustration is rapidly building now that she feels as though she's the bad guy, when she wanted to teach the younger girl how to make bad guys pay.\_

Not knowing what else to do and honestly a little fearful of losing the only friend she's ever had, she scoots a little closer to conform herself to the child's back and squeezes in a tighter embrace. "Don't be sad Kalli," she rests her chin on top of the sandy blonde hair, her eyes shift and she reluctantly mumbles the rest, "I'm sorry for making you cry..." The sniffles threaten to tear her apart and her heart sinks as her throat constricts, she feels even worse and the empty stomach isn't helping whatsoever. "C'mon, what's it gonna take to cheer you up?" She's too weak to do much, and it's making her feeble temper teeter on the edge.

Soft palms smooth along one of her forearms, she tilts her head to look over Kallian's shoulder and reaches up with a free hand to wipe away the tears. She's trying to hold herself back from snapping, but the longer she waits for a response the more agitated she gets as the salty liquid moistens her fingers. Her ears droop and her eyebrows furrow when she hears the child choke weakly, "I wanna help. I **\*\*am\*\*** helping, mamae said it's bad not to be nice." Well no shit.\_

"You are helping me Kalli, lots too. It's all good innit? Just quit cryin', yer making me feel bad and I wanna be nice too." She feels the girl nod and dusty hair scratches the side of her cheek, all these new sensations feel weird but oddly good in it's own way. She's never experienced the touch of another being unless it was a slap to keep her hands away from food on the merchant carts, and the only liquid she's ever felt -apart from the rare occurrence of rain or her own tears- was either human or glorious proper elf spit on her face.

Fingers brush over her ripped breeches, and she watches with a small smile of relief when Kallian's legs idly kick around as they sway off the edge of the scaffolding. The sniffles slow and eventually stop, the two simply watch the bustle of all the elves below as a crowd

gradually gathers at a small podium near the vhenadah1. \_What's praying at a stupid tree gonna do?\_ She points over and whispers, "told ya this would be a better spot to watch. That's all for yer mum, Kalli." \_Fucking pricks are gonna thank her after stealing all the shite in her house, didn't leave nothin' for Kalli when they all watched and saw what happened to 'er.\_

"Are they going to bring her back?"

"What? No, the dead \_can't\_ come back." She bites her tongue when she feels the little girl tense from the cruel truth, then hushes gently, "she's in a much better place Kalli, trust me."

"Why didn't she take me with her?" \_Fuck.\_ Sera's backing herself into a corner and she gropes for words, then opts to stay quiet as she pulls the child in what she knows \_won't\_ be a comforting hug no matter how much she wishes it to be. \_Not like words will fix anything anyways, they can't even help put food in my belly.\_ "I miss mamae..."

"I know." Her jaw clenches as she lies through her teeth, "I miss her too." \_Don't know who she is, but I don't wanna hear Kalli cry anymore.\_ "She was real nice, and uh... Funny too."

"Mm-hm!" The child kicks her legs out and suddenly giggles, a rich sound Sera's never heard before. \_Nobody laughs in this shithole.\_ She melts with relief, and for once she's glad to listen. "Used to sing a lulluh-bye too," \_a what?\_ "A puppy used to come out 'round back and I got to help feed it. And mamae's lentil soup was the best." \_She keeps changing topics!\_ That earns an eye twitch, Sera's been scavenging for scraps and fighting to survive, and here this little girl happily confesses of her \_comfortable\_ life. \_Bloody mutt got to eat more than me...\_ "We had flowers in the back too," \_what's that got to do with the dog?\_

"So, you had that much food lyin' around?" \_The jerks who stole everything must be real happy.\_

"Nah!" \_Huh?\_ "Mamae found out that I wasn't eating my stuff 'cause I'd sneak out and give it to the puppy," Kallian grumbles with a blatant sulky tone, "she spanked me lots for it." \_Guess she didn't have it all good either.\_ "But I felt bad 'cause it'd whine, and it was smaller than me. I thought it'd grow taller if it ate," \_don't she know all the animals here are gonna be smaller? Surprised that mutt ain't beaten to be eaten, itself.\_ "So mamae said she'd give up half her dinner and I'd give up half mine," the child looks up and Sera stares at the grin upside down, she blinks a few times when Kallian demands, "sing to me!" \_Can she sit still and just stick to one thing?\_

"No." \_'Sides, I dunno what to sing, and I'm too hungry.\_

"I used to play by the sand patch," \_I can't keep up with her. What's she even talking about?\_ The stories continue to change subjects like the wind, and eventually it goes through one ear and out the other as Sera stares at the blue sky, while the \_chatterbox\_ kept going on and on about things the older elf couldn't truly care for. She's frail, starving, her eyes sag and it feels as though there's holes in her \_bones,\_ she's sure they'll crumble to dust if she tries to stand. \_I'm really hungry...\_ Her ears twitch and she vaguely hears the low

chanting from the crowd below, but the little girl is completely oblivious to the memorial service for her mother.

\_Should I tell her to shut it and listen? Will she remember when she grows up?\_ She's snapped out of her thoughts and her heart hammers with hope when she hears something surprisingly \_amazing\_ that tumbles out of Kallian's mouth, \_for once.\_ "And mamacae used to hide some stuff in a box, I got to help her bury it in the garden."

"\*\*What?!\*\*" Sera had to hold extra tight when the child jumped -startled by the older elf's sudden shout- and when Kallian looked up at her with frightened eyes, she shook her head furiously. "Sorry-uh, nonono don't cry," she \_sh's\_ out of instinct and cradles the little girl closer, she's struggling not to lash out in anger for they could have saved a lot of time and heartache if Kallian said this yesterday. \_Fuck. There's no way I was this bad when I was as old as her.\_ "C'mon, how 'bout we sneak to yer garden and get the box?"

"But it's buried." \_Well duh~ you just said that.\_

"So we... \_Un\_-bury it, maybe find the puppy after?" That did the trick, the child wrestles to turn in the embrace and bounces on her knees while Sera holds on to the tiny wrists for her dear life. "Yer gonna fall, calm down Kalli!" She panics and pulls harshly until the younger girl crashes into her as she falls back, her heart is hammering away at her chest and she desperately gulps for air while Kallian giggles against her. \_For fuck's sake, how does she not get that she can bloody die if she falls offa here?\_ The rush of breaths tickle the side of her neck before the child hastily pushes up and climbs above her, Sera's head snaps up when she's accidentally kneed under the chin, "ow, fuck!"

"You said a bad word again!" \_That's it!\_ Enough is enough, play time is over. The older elf carefully rolls on her stomach then scrambles up on her aching feet, she chases after the reckless giggler and curses when she hears Kallian shout excitedly, "let's play tag!"

"\_\*\*No!\*\*\_" We gotta go to yer house for food!"

"But I'm not hungry!"

"Coz you ate \_my\_ food, and I'm still hungry!" She struggles to keep up and limps when her foot throbs, but pushes herself regardless. She helped lift Kallian when they climbed up the scaffolding, and she's worried the child will hurt herself if she tries to jump back down without any help.

"Well I wanna play!" \_\*\*Fuck.\*\*\_ This brat is gonna be the end of me.\_ Sera forces herself to sprint, and bites back the urge to yelp when sharp pain diffuses along the entirety of her heel; she miraculously makes it to grasp the little girl's wrist and pulls her back, before she tries to escape by leaping to the next scaffold.

"You'll break yer fucking legs, idiot! I'm not in the mood for games, we're going to your house right now!" She's too aggravated to notice the way the steel-blue eyes water, she squeezes the tiny hand roughly

and kneels, "wait 'til I go down, then I'll help you out." She bites her tongue when her anger simmers as Kallian nods fervently, she sighs exasperatedly and her head hangs dejectedly. "Look, I won't yell at you if y'just listen to me alright? We'll play later for sure, but my foot's hurting and I'm hungry. You wouldn't wanna play if you were hungry too, right?" Another nod, and her eyebrows furrow as she smiles sadly. She pats the sandy blonde hair then ruffles it on purpose, she braces a palm along the edge and jumps down to the next scaffold.

\_Crap, it's definitely getting worse. \_She cringes and bites back a yelp so as not to scare the \_crybaby\_ when she slams down, then turns around and reaches up until her hands just barely cup underneath Kallian's armpits. "Uh, turn 'round and see if you can climb down coz there's no way I'll be able to lift ya."

"What if I fall?"

"\*\*Now\*\* yer worried about falling?" She retorts with blatant annoyance, then sighs as she shakes her head, "you won't fall. I gotcha, but I need you to help me out, 'kay? Be \_nice\_ to me, and trust me. I'll always protect you."

"Promise?"

\_Shit.\_ Sera's eyebrows knit and she musters a meager guilty smile, she isn't entirely sure if she \_can\_ promise something like this. \_But I said I'd always stick around, and I will. But she's gotta do the same.\_ And then an idea hits her, and she grins reassuringly as she nods with confidence. "Promise, but only if you do the same for me." Instead of following through with the plan in which the younger elf would turn around and climb down, Kallian shuffles to the edge and Sera has all of two seconds to brace herself for the child that leaps on her.

Arms weave around her neck and legs hook around her waist as she struggles to keep upright, her injured foot slides back to help keep her balance and her heart pounds in her ears when she sees how dangerously close the two are of falling down to the next level. "Promise, I'll always protect you too!" \_This is the fucking opposite, is she trying to kill me?!\_ She doesn't have enough strength to hold the girl up, she can't even pry off the \_monkey\_ that's hugging her tightly. And then she stiffens when Kallian buries her face in the side of the older girl's neck as she mumbles timidly, "you're my best friend, Sera." Her heart swells with warmth, and Sera easily hugs back as she carefully kneels before her legs cave out on her.

"You're my best friend too, Kalli."

\_My only one.\_

\* \* \*

><p>"Do you remember where yer mum usually buried the goods?" They only have one hand shovel and though the 'garden' isn't exactly large, it'll still take Sera ages to try and dig when she swears her own stomach is digging through as it eats itself. There's a gaping hole and it growls incessantly, her shoulders sag and she loses her temper far faster now. Her tongue is sore from the biting, any time

she snaps the little girl cries and it only makes her even angrier. <em>Won't get nothing done then.</em> Kallian drops down on her hands and knees and starts to poke fingers in the dirt, and the older elf watches with confusion. "Uh... What are you doing?"

"Mamae shoved a big rock inside too," the child's tongue sticks out the corner and Sera can't help but giggle when Kallian suddenly attacks the dirt in a flurry of pokes. It's lost for the younger elf is completely focused on the task now, and Sera helps join the \_assault\_ as the two prod the ground. The shovel is shoved inside and both their heads snap as their ears perk at the sound of a tiny clang, and the older girl winces at the strong vibrations as she hits the buried rock a few more times. Sera glances around to ensure they aren't being watched, \_but most are probably at that big tree still.\_ She steals a glance at the child and guilt laces her conscience, she never really explained what the service was about nor allowed Kallian the time to properly grieve for her mother.

\_Will she hate me? Will we still be friends?\_ Still, it's unavoidable and she **must** put her own needs first. She feels as though she's about to collapse from exhaustion, and she has to at least put something \_hopefully\_ relatively edible in her belly. As soon as the rock is taken out, both of them rip apart the dirt with their bare hands until Sera's fingers scrape hard wood, and she clutches it at the ends as Kallian works to reveal the tiny chest. There's handles on each side and the girls take one each, pulling with all their might until the box gradually inches its way out of the ground. They fall flat on their backs when the chest is free and both giggle madly, proud of their accomplishment.

"We should do this too," Sera wheezes breathlessly, "if we ever wanna hide stuff, just bury it here." It takes her longer to recover than the younger elf seemingly filled with boundless energy, and Kallian struggles as she pulls at the lock keeping the chest closed. "Wait, lemme do that before ya hurt yourself."

"I wanna protect you too," the child insists with a sullen tone, and Sera blinks once, twice, then smirks as she pushes herself up to her elbows.

"From a fucking lock? Pretty sure I'm fine, Kalli. Gimme the rock we pulled out, I'm gonna smash the lock off." She takes big gulps of air to get her breathing under control, her arms are shaking from fatigue but she's just oh \_so\_ close to the damn prize. If it turns up empty, she doesn't know what she'll do first: choke the child or cry. \_Or just do both.\_ The rock is pushed in her palm and her eyebrows knit together, when Kallian shoots up only to dart through the back door of her own home. "Hey, where ya going?!"

"Gonna find...!" The rest of the words are muffled and lost, Sera shrugs as she lines up the rock and makes a few mock swings to ensure she'll hit the lock. She raises her arm then drops it one fell swoop, she reflexively releases the rock and cusses when the powerful vibration ripples through her fragile hand. \_This is gonna take forever...\_ The chest is barely dented and the lock scratched, the older elf reluctantly picks up the rock to try again. Just as she's about to swing down, she's startled by Kallian's sudden appearance as the child crashes on her knees in front of the box, hand thrust in Sera's face.

\_Huh...?\_ "What's this?" Gingerly unraveling the soft fingers, a small copper key hangs on a worn rope and rests in the tiny palm. The older elf grins as she eagerly drops the rock, "great job Kalli. Where'd you find this?"

"On mamae."

—...—

—\*\*WHAT\*\*\_\_\*\*?!\*\*\_

Blinking in disbelief, Sera's grin falls and her head snaps up to the watery steel-blue orbs. \_That crowd wasn't for her mum then?\_ The child musters a brave front as she smiles weakly, still proud of her find. She's desperately trying to keep it together and not cry, and Sera swiftly scoots to the side as her knees drag along the dirt. She instinctively reaches forward and wraps her arms around the trembling shoulders, then cradles Kallian in a crushing embrace as she buries her face in the sandy blonde hair. "Why did you go by yourself, Kalli?" Her whisper quivers, her eyes squeeze shut and they burn with tears of frustration. Her heart sinks when Kallian murmurs back, as small fists clutch Sera's tattered shirt.

"Because I promised I'd protect you." \_What the fuck are you even protecting me from? I should be doing that for you, dummy...\_ "You said you missed her too."

\*\*\_Fuck\_\*\*\_.\_

And it was from that point forward that Sera swore to herself she'd teach herself to pick locks instead.

\* \* \*

><p>Tears stream down freckled cheeks, and for once it doesn't belong to the little girl. Sera grits her teeth and her pained groans are lost to the shirt she's stuffed in her mouth, she's trying to repress her cries as she rubs elfroot along the gash on her foot. The chest was loaded with jarred food and packaged jerky along with some bagged herbs, all the <em>emergency<em> goods stayed in the box when Sera tried to get the lesson across Kallian that they \_had\_ to ration what they've got, or they'll blow through it all in a day and starve for the rest of the week.

Naturally that didn't go smoothly, and the younger elf had difficulty understanding that \_good things \_\_\*\*never\*\*\_\_ last.\_ So instead Sera donned the necklace with the key and locked the chest again, to ensure Kallian wouldn't accidentally break the jars if she tried to open them by herself. The little girl sits and sulks as she idly rips out strands of grass, and it's honestly a little endearing that despite being upset, she still glances over her shoulder to check on Sera as the older elf tends to her heel. Kallian gradually inches and shifts on her bum to sit a little closer and \_finally \_by the end of the grueling treatment, she rests against Sera's back and gives a small nudge. "Is it better yet, Sera?"

"Will be," the words are muffled by the tattered fabric, and the older elf blindly reaches back until her hand smooths over another. She taps it and looks over her shoulder as she spits out the end of her shirt, and manages a tired smile as she looks back at steel-blue



orbs swimming with concern. "I'm fine, Kalli. I'm starving too, how 'bout we open one jar and dig in now?" The child nods excitedly and eagerly spins on her bum as she crawls over in front, Sera works to open the chest and picks out a jar of mixed berries then hands it over to Kallian as she locks the box back up. She giggles when the little girl desperately tries to rip off the cork lid, then swipes it and sinks her sharp canines in as she angles to jar. She eases it nice and slow, and notices how wide eyes watch with clear awe as she pops the lid off. "There we go, eat up."

\_Normally wouldn't let someone grubby like 'er get first pick, but she's earned it. It's thanks to her I don't have to go digging in trash for at least a week if we're lucky and don't get greedy. Makes up for the loaf too, I can't remember the last time I've eaten berries.\_ It's truly a \_god sent\_ gift and she considers herself extremely lucky, even getting an orange as a birthday present is considered both expensive and a blessing if one doesn't have connections or work on a farm. \_They won't even lemme work there, too young they said. Then they spat at me and said I'd just steal, arseholes.\_ "Hey, hey," Kallian's lips smack loudly as she chews with an open mouth, and bits of the berries fly out as she asks excitedly, "can we play after?"

"\_Eugh~\_ Kalli close your mouth when yer eating, you're wasting your food by spitting it all over me!" Sera's heart skips a beat and she has an alarmed look when she sees a mischievous smile, and suddenly she's tackled by the child. She holds the jar away at a safe distance and giggles with a mix of \_ew's\_ when a tongue slides along her cheek to collect the bits spat on her, she's too exhausted to push the girl off and groans when she struggles. "Yer too heavy! Get off me, I don't want your cooties!"

"I'm smaller but stronger," Kallian settles on the older girl's hips and beams with pride, and Sera carefully sets the jar down a safe distance away as she grins evilly.

"I'll show you who's stronger," she reaches up and hooks her hands under the child's armpits, then lifts with all her might and tilts to the right until Kallian topples over. The two play fight and wrestle in the dirt, uncaring of their tattered clothes or the sweat that steadily collects on their skin. For **\*\*once\*\*** in years, Sera feels like an actual child rather than a dirty scavenger, looked down upon by both humans and elves alike. Her giggles fill the air along with the younger elf's panting laughter, and soon enough they exhaustively plop on the ground as they stare at the sky.

"Why-" Kallian wheezes, and Sera weakly rolls over to reach for the jar of berries then settles it in between them to munch as they gaze at the expansive clouds. "Is the sky blue, Sera?"

"I dunno, coz green is ugly? Even the sky wants to look nice."

"The sky likes to look pretty too?"\_ Wait, she seriously believed me?\_ The older girl chuckles tiredly and plucks a berry from the jar, then pops it in her mouth as she hums in agreement. "Why does it want to be pretty?" \_She can be annoying, but she's lotsa fun too.\_

"I dunno, maybe it likes the sun." She looks over and snickers when Kallian's steel-blue orbs widen as they dart about, \_she's too gullible.\_ "So if it looks pretty, then the sun shines brighter

